

Message Text

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EXDIS

FOR ASST SEC ROGERS FROM AMB HILL

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, AR

SUBJECT: LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH SENIOR MEMBERS OF GOVT

1. ON APRIL 22 I LUNCHEONED AT THE HOME OF ALEJANDRO SHAW WITH ADMIRAL MASSERA, MINISTER OF DEFENSE KLIX, SECRETARY OF FINANCE ALEMANN, SECRETARY OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AND COORDINATION KLEIN AND SEVERAL OTHERS. MASSERA WAS HIS USUAL JOVIAL SELF AND LEFT EARLY TO GET BACK TO WORK. ALL EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN THE NEW GOVT'S SUCCESS. THESE ARE INTELLIGENT, WELL-MEANING MEN. YET, I CAME AWAY FROM THE LUNCHEON WITH A SENSE OF UNEASE. ONE CANNOT FORM ANY DEFINITIVE JUDGMENTS OR MAKE PREDICTIONS ON THE BASIS OF ONE LUNCHEON CONVERSATION, BUT I DID READ SOME STORM WARNINGS.

2. FIRST OF ALL, WHILE THE NEW GOVT IS OFF TO A GOOD START, IT HAS A LONG AND MOST DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD. THERE SHOULD BE NO ROOM FOR COCKINESS. UNFORTUNATELY, HOWEVER, THERE WAS SOME OF THAT AT THE LUNCHEON. WHEN I ASKED KLEIN, FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT ARRANGEMENT THE GOVT WAS LIKELY TO NEGOTIATE WITH LABOR, HE REPLIED THAT THE GOVT HAD NOT YET MADE ANY MOVE TO REACH AN ACCOMMODATION WITH LABOR, NOR DID IT INTEND TO DO SO. HE PROFESSED HIMSELF TO BE UNCONCERNED. "LABOR WILL HAVE TO COME TO US," HE SAID. KLEIN WAS EQUALLY INSOUCIANT CONCERNING THE WAGE-PRICE SQUEEZE. I NOTED THAT PRICES ARE CLIMBING BUT WAGES ARE NOT. THIS OF COURSE IS

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IN LINE WITH THE GOVT'S ANTI-INFLATIONARY AUSTERITY MEASURES,

BUT, I ASKED, DID THE GOVT PLAN ANY MEASURES TO GIVE THE WAGE-EARNER SOME RELIEF OR AT LEAST TO MAKE THE PILL LESS BITTER TO SWALLOW?

3. KLEIN REPLIED IN THE NEGATIVE. THE ARGENTINE WAGE-EARNER, HE SAID, WILL JUST HAVE TO LEARN TO SHOP MORE WISELY. THERE IS PROBABLY A GOOD DEAL IN THAT, BUT THE WAY IN WHICH HE ANSWERED SUGGESTED THAT KLEIN AT LEAST IS NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE VIEWS OF THE WAGE-EARNER.

4. MASSERA HIMSELF CONTINUED TO REFLECT BALANCE AND MODERATION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE, BUT SOME OF THE OTHERS AT THE TABLE SEEMED TO FAVOR A HARDER LINE. WHEN I ASKED WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PREVIOUS GOVT BEING HELD ON SHIPS IN THE HARBOR, MASSERA ANSWERED THAT A LIST OF ALL THOSE HELD WILL BE ISSUED SHORTLY, THAT EACH IS BEING INVESTIGATED, AND, IF NECESSARY, WILL BE TRIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW. ALEMANN, HOWEVER, ADDED THAT I SHOULD REMEMBER THAT "ALL THOSE PEOPLE ARE CRIMINALS," AND SEVERAL OTHERS PRESENT SUGGESTED THAT NO ONE SHOULD WASTE ANY SYMPATHY ON THE LIKES OF LORENZO MIGUEL. WAYNE SMITH, THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR, WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED ME, SAID THE QUESTION WAS NOT ONE OF SYMPATHY FOR MIGUEL AND THOSE OF HIS ILK BUT OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE TREATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW. IF THEY ARE NO, VOICES MIGHT BE RAISED ABROAD IN THEIR DEFENSE AND THE GOA'S IMAGE WOULD SUFFER. ONE OF THE OTHER GUESTS STATED THAT ONLY THOSE WHO HAD THEMSELVES SHOWN RESPECT FOR THE LAW DESERVED ITS PROTECTION. ADMIRAL MASSERA, I AM HAPPY TO SAY, DID NOT AGREE WITH THIS APPROACH TO THE APPLICATION OF THE LAW; RATHER, HE CONTINUED TO SAY THAT EVERYTHING MUST BE AND WOULD BE DONE LEGALLY.

5. ALL AT THE TABLE AGREED THAT THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE TERRORISTS MUST BE PROSECUTED VIGOROUSLY. DEFENSE MINISTER KLIX WENT EVEN FURTHER. HE INSISTED THAT "ONE MUST BE FANATIC TO DEFEAT FANATICS" AND OBSERVED THAT "IF THE OTHER SIDE HITS BELOW THE BELT, SO MUST WE." EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANT BY THAT IS OPEN TO QUESTION, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT KLIX IS NEITHER AS PRUDENT NOR AS WEDDED TO A RULE OF LAW AS IS VIDELA.

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6. WHAT IS SAID AT LUNCH DOES NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE GOVT'S OFFICIAL POLICIES, BUT IT DOES REVEAL SOMETHING CONCERNING THE THINKING OF ITS MEMBERS. THE JUNTA HAS SO FAR MAINTAINED THE SUPPORT OF THE MAJORITY PRECISELY BECAUSE IT HAS ACTED WITH MODERATION AND HAS TRIED TO REMAIN WITHIN THE LAW. THE OVERALL IMPRESSION I CARRIED AWAY FROM THE APRIL 22 LUNCHEON, HOWEVER, IS THAT THERE ARE SOME IN THE

GOVERNMENT WHO ARE NOT AS ENTHUSIASTIC OVER THIS APPROACH
AS IS VIDELA. THIS IS DISTURBING AND BODES ILL FOR THE
FUTURE. WHAT IS NEEDED HERE IS VISION AND RECONCILIATION,
NOT A RETURN TO THE PETTY VINDICTIVENESS OF THE PAST.
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